

## **Home Modification Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Occupational or Physical Therapy Evaluation Questions**

*Who pays for the OT/PT evaluation?* Waiver funds can be used to pay for the PT or OT evaluation. There is no rule saying that only waiver funds can be used for this, and sometimes families already have access to a report from an OT or PT recommending environmental modifications. Depending on the level of detail in that report, it is possible that no further report will be needed for this part of the information.

*How do I find an OT or PT who will perform these evaluations?* SC's can search by provider type through the Report Manager system. It can provide a list of all contracted individuals or companies in specific geographical areas. It could also be helpful to talk to other SC's or the TCM/TAC's for recommendations.

*What if the PT or OT's report does not recommend the home modification?* If there is no recommendation from an OT or PT for a modification, it will not be approved for Waiver funding.

*How is the OT/PT evaluation used?* The Support Coordinator will submit the OT/PT evaluation as part of the ISP to the UR Committee for approval. This evaluation is part of the documentation that will support the request for waiver funding. It also serves as the basis for the bids from the potential contractors.

*Does the OT or PT need a physician's order to conduct the evaluation?* While PT's and OT's often need a physician's orders to provide services, for this service (environmental modification assessments) they do not. They are able to provide this particular service as a part of their independent scope of practice.

*Can any OT or PT be used for this service?* Yes, as long as they have a contract with the Division of DD to provide waiver funded services.

### **Building Contractor Provider Questions**

*What do the qualifications of the building contractor providers have to be?* The companies providing the estimate and submitting a bid must have a contract with Division that allows them to bill for those services.

*What if we prefer the company who gives the higher bid? Do we always have to use the lowest bid?* URC will review all bids and approve the lowest and/or best price if the price is reasonable based on the purchase experience of the regional office of similar jobs, equipment or supplies and does not exceed the annual maximum allowed for the service.

*What if we can only find one qualified company to provide a bid?* Essentially, the SC is expected to document a good-faith effort to obtain additional bids. Even if only one qualified company is found who will agree to submit a bid, the efforts (including company name, contact information, date(s) contacted and the response from the alternative contractors) must be documented.

*After we pick one company, can the other companies sue us or appeal our decision?* No, a decision to award a bid is not appealable by the other contractor.

*Is there a limit to how much money can be spent on environmental modifications?* The annual maximum allowed for this service through the waiver is \$7500 per year. If an individual's need cannot be met with the limit, an exception may be approved by the Regional Director to exceed the limit if this will result in a decreased need of one of more other services. The limit for the exception is \$10,000 per year.

## **Other FAQ's**

*Can an individual or family get reimbursed for a home modification we have already made?* No waiver funded service is to be provided without prior approval. This means that the waiver cannot be used to reimburse anyone for an environmental modification that already been planned and purchased before the approval of the Division of DD.

*Can providers use waiver funds to make their facilities more accessible for individuals with disabilities?* No. These funds are limited to use in the individual's residence.

*Can we use waiver funds to build an addition to our home?* No, these funds cannot be used to increase the footprint of the home unless absolutely necessary to complete an adaptation.

*Can we use waiver funds to make changes to property we are renting or do we have to own our own home?* EAA can be approved for any residential setting where the individual lives, regardless of whether it is owned or leased. The waiver cannot be used to fund modifications to service-provider owned or leased settings such as an Independent Supported Living setting or Group Home.

*Is there a rule of thumb to help us understand the difference between home modifications and specialized medical equipment?* If the item is attached to the home, then it would be considered a home modification (or EAA) and not specialized medical equipment (SME). For example, a grab bar is attached to the home structure, and so would be EAA. A portable shower chair, though, is not attached to the home and would be considered SME.

*Can we use these funds to make repairs to the home, such as fixing a leaky roof or repairing a heating system or worn carpet?* No. The definition for this service specifically excludes those types of general changes to a home. There are other specific exclusions to the types of modification that can be funded through the waiver.

*Can Waiver funds be used to remove Home Mods when the individual leaves that home?* No, that is specifically excluded.

*Can we choose the style and appearance of the modification to match our home?* Generally, no. The waiver pays only for “construction grade” materials. You might be able to have choices within the category of “construction grade materials” depending on the situation. You can discuss the choices, if any are available, with the provider. Any cost above the construction grade may be met by the person or family, including any additional cost necessary to meet a home owner association or historic district. Think of it this way: the waiver is available to improve the function of the home, not the appearance of the home.

*Can waiver funds be used to modify Shared Living homes?* No. This is considered to be a form of provider-owned homes.

*What do you do when there are two individuals (both of whom are waiver eligible) in the same home who would both benefit from waiver funded environmental modifications?* Situations such as these require clear and consistent communication between the Support Coordinators. Both individuals will require separate OT/PT evaluations and reports. If a specific modification benefits only one of the individuals, the funding for that modification can only be connected with that individual’s plan. For modifications that could benefit either individual, the Support Coordinators must discuss the situation and divide the changes and associated costs between the plans.

### **Home Modification for Individuals Not Yet Living In the Home**

*Can environmental adaptations or modifications be made before the individual has moved into the home?* Yes, as long as there is a certainty that the individual will move into the home at a certain date in the near future. If the individual does not end up moving to the modified home then the provider will not be paid for the modification

Modifications to a home can occur before the individual actually resides at that location. For example, an individual living at a Habilitation Center may require specific changes to the location in the community to which he or she will move, and those changes have to be in place in order for the person to be able to live there. This situation could also occur if an individual is already living in the community but, for one reason or another, is anticipating a move to another home (for example, someone currently living with parents but who wants to relocate to an apartment in the community so he or she can experience greater independence).

As with any other waiver funded service, Home Modification is only available to individuals who are participating in a waiver. A plan would be developed in the same sequence as any other home modification and, if the individual is not already participating in a waiver, a

request for waiver participation would accompany the submitted ISP. This is no different than the process for an individual requesting first time support through any other waiver service.

With Home Modification, the modification service is not considered to have been “delivered” to the individual until that person begins to reside at the modified location. This means that, while the construction or installation will occur before the person resides in the home, the contractor cannot be reimbursed before the individual moves in. The OT or PT evaluation, though, *could* be eligible for reimbursement because the product being delivered is the evaluation itself, not the modified home.

So, approval can be given for a Home Modification before the individual actually resides in that home. The individual would have to be accepted for participation in a waiver, and the plan would have to be approved prior to the beginning of the installation or construction. The OT or PT can bill for their evaluation before the individual moves in (or even if the individual never moves in) because their service is the evaluation itself. The contractor cannot bill until and unless the individual moves in, because until the individual actually resides in the new home the individual doesn’t receive any benefit until that time.

### **Home modifications in poorly maintained or constructed homes.**

There are times when the SC, family, Regional Office or other people involved in a home modification project could have serious concerns about the wisdom of modifying a home that is (or is perceived to be) of poor structural quality. Clearly, RO staff and Support Coordinators do not have (nor are expected to have), the expertise to determine the structural ability and integrity of a home. This becomes a serious issue when there is the inaccurate expectation that waiver funds could be used for the needed repairs.

Mobile homes: There is often an assumption that the term “mobile home” or “trailer” equals poor quality of construction. That assumption is sometimes accurate, but there are also mobile homes constructed to standards equal or higher than stick-built homes. When considering a modification to a mobile home it would be wise to bring up in conversation the possibility that construction methods of a mobile homes could pose barriers to modifications. We owe it to the individual and family to be up front about this from the beginning.

Older homes: Homes built before current standards or homes built in areas without building permit requirements can also be an issue. Narrow doors, tight turns, out-of-date wiring, improper venting, general disrepair, etc. are challenges found in many old homes. Keep in mind: waiver funds cannot be used to remedy these issues, even if they pose health and safety risk to the individual.

In some cases, the poor condition of the home prevents the modification from being done. Generally, decisions about feasibility of modifications should be made by the professional home modification provider. The SC and RO should assure service definition requirements pertaining to adherence to codes, permits, licenses, etc. are followed as they set standards for proper and safe construction.

Complicating matters further, a contractor may begin a modification then discover rot, termites or other unforeseen damage that halts the project until remedied. Because the areas of a home most vulnerable to unseen damage by termites or rot from leaking roof, windows or kitchen and laundry appliances are not normally involved in the type of modifications funded by the Division (door widening and bath modifications) this issue is not common. If the problem is minor, such as a few 2x4's or small section of subfloor damaged from a leak in a bathroom, the provider may make the repair for no additional cost. Providers are not obligated to do this so clear communication and careful evaluation of the area to be modified before the job starts is important. The homeowner could also arrange for these problems to be fixed, as long as the provider was agreeable to the plan and the waiver funds are not used for the repair.

Whether an older home or a mobile or manufactured home, it could be a good idea to ask permission to take some pictures of the home, particularly of the area of the proposed modifications. These photos can help potential contractors determine whether or not this is a project they might consider. This may also be a situation where a neutral third party with experience, such as Mo Housing, could come in and provide some recommendations. Once again, these situations call for careful planning, investigation, and clear communication.